U.N.: Large ozone hole predicted

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Body

GENEVA (AP) - The hole in the ozone layer over the South Pole is expected to be as big this year as it has ever been since measurements began several years ago, the World Meteorological Organization said Monday.

The whirlpool-like wind that develops every year in the stratosphere above the South Pole is very strong, threatening to create a large ozone hole, said John M. Miller, chief of the U.N. weather agency's environment division.

"Out of the past eight years, this is probably one of the strongest beginnings," he said. International measurements began in 1991.

The hole, which forms annually over the South Pole and will probably last until December, allows the sun's dangerous ultraviolet radiation to reach the Antarctic. As in some earlier years, it might be large enough that radiation hits the southern tip of South America.

The ozone layer, located about 15 miles above the Earth, is a shield against the sun's deadly ultraviolet radiation. A thinning ozone layer can let in enough UV light to cause skin cancers and cataracts, and can damage many plants and animals.

Miller and other U.N. officials said efforts to stop the production of chemicals that damage the ozone layer continue to be successful, but there will be little noticeable improvement for 20 years.

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